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ABSTRACT

The relationship between psychosocial development and ego identity was explored among a group of 29 married women, 21-59 years old. After being interviewed, subjects were assigned to one of four categories of identity status, based on their statements regarding decision-making and commitment. There were significant differences between identity categories in resolution of all psychosocial stages in the Inventory of Psychosocial Development (IPD). Women in the Identity Achievement category (showing the most "active" level of decision-making and subsequent commitment) scored significantly higher than women in the other categories on all IPD stages except intimacy and trust. These differences provide empirical support for Erickson's theory of psychosocial development as well as some discriminant validity for the IPD. (Author/CS)

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EGO IDENTITY IN MATURE WOMEN

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Ego Identity in Mature Women[1]

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The present study had two purposes: to investigate the relationship between general psychosocial development and ego identity; and to describe patterns of identity formation in mature women.

Subjects

Our subjects were 29 married women, ranging in age from 21-59 years old (mean = 35). They were selected from 4 settings: 6 were from a course emphasizing traditional feminine behavior; 14 were from a politically moderate women's center; 5 were from a college campus; and 4 were from non-specific sources. All subjects volunteered their participation.

Procedure

Subjects completed the Inventory of Psychosocial Development (IPD) (Constantinople, 1969), a 60-item scale scored for successful or unsuccessful resolution of each of the first six stages in Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development as well as the Internal-External measure of locus of control (Rotter, 1966), a 29-item questionnaire indicating the extent to which an individual believes that her rewards are due to her own effort or to luck or fate. After returning by mail the IPD and I-E measures, subjects were interviewed in their own homes by a female psychology graduate student.

The interview used was the standard ego identity status measure developed by Marcia (1966) incorporating additional areas previously used by Josselson (early memories, important developmental influences, self-description, recent life changes, future plans and aspirations, dreams and fantasies). On the basis of the standard identity status interview, individuals were assigned to one of four categories based upon their statements of active decision-making and degree of subsequent commitment in the areas of occupation, ideology, and attitudes

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toward sexuality. The four identity statuses are: Identity Achievement (active decision-making and subsequent commitment); Moratorium (currently in decision-making process with vague commitments); Foreclosure (no decision-making evident but firm, usually parentally-inspired commitment); and Identity Diffusion (no commitment, with or without decision-making). Interscorer reliability between the interviewer and another trained rater (a 39 year old married woman) was 93%. Differences were resolved in favor of the interviewer. All interviews and test data were coded to preserve anonymity.

Results

Quantitative. Significant differences were obtained among the identity statuses on all IPD psychosocial stages as well as on the overall score.

Insert Table 1 about here

Identity Achievement women scored significantly higher than women in the other statuses on all IPD stages except for intimacy and trust; on these two variables, they scored about the same as Foreclosures, and these two statuses together scored significantly higher than did the others. Identity Diffusion women scored lowest of the statuses on all IPD variables. On 6 out of 7 IPD variables Foreclosures were more similar to Achievements than were Moratoriums--a contrast with findings for men on similar measures, but one consistent with many previous studies with women thereby supporting previous suggestions that a foreclosure identity might be somewhat more adaptive for women than for men (Marcia, 1976, 1980).

As predicted, Identity Achievement women also had a more internal locus of control than did women in the other statuses ($t = 2.13$, $df = 27$, $p < .05$).

Qualitative. Following are descriptions from interview material of how married women in the identity statuses appeared in this study. Identity Achievement: Most had gone through a 3-stage process: (1) initial adoption

Table 1

Ego identity and IPD scores

	Identity status					
	Identity Achievement (N=7)	Moratorium (N=8)	Foreclosure (N=7)	Identity Diffusion (N=7)	f (df=3/25)	p
Basic Trust vs. Mistrust	14.86 (SD=3.80)	11.88 (SD=5.19)	14.43 (SD=5.74)	4.29 (SD=8.99)	4.38	.013
[2]Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt	11.43 (SD=2.51)	8.00 (SD=4.24)	6.86 (SD=5.70)	3.43 (SD=5.74)	3.43	.032
Initiative vs. Guilt	20.00 (SD=3.37)	9.75 (SD=7.05)	13.71 (SD=4.75)	3.14 (SD=8.25)	9.15	.001
Industry vs. Inferiority	19.71 (SD=5.31)	12.50 (SD=4.96)	13.29 (SD=5.09)	7.14 (SD=8.36)	5.08	.007
Identity vs. Identity Diffusion	13.00 (SD=1.41)	7.63 (SD=4.07)	11.71 (SD=2.63)	2.57 (SD=3.07)	14.97	.001
Intimacy vs. Isolation	18.29 (SD=5.41)	15.50 (SD=5.15)	18.43 (SD=4.86)	9.86 (SD=6.31)	3.79	.023
Overall psycho-social development	97.29 (SD=11.67)	65.25 (SD=14.33)	78.43 (SD=14.92)	31.29 (SD=11.58)	14.15	.001

[2]These are summary scores obtained by subtracting the negative score (e.g. Mistrust) from the positive one (e.g. Basic Trust) for a given dimension.

of accepted social roles ("I was, through my husband, something."); (2) rejection, sometimes bitter and angry, of these forms (the "get your own damn butter" phase); and (3) eventual resolution of the issue via compromise between their nurturance-giving and achievement needs. They saw themselves as competent, independent, and assertive. Often, they had re-arranged their family structures to meet their own occupational and ideological commitments. In some cases where the family structure would not bend, they refused to forego their own needs, thus precipitating family break-up. Moratorium: They were involved in a kind of yes-but game wherein they "wanted to be themselves" but felt guilty about this. On one hand, they were defiant; on the other, approval-seeking and afraid. They seemed to want a guarantee. While they often hated their wife-mother roles, they still wanted to perform them flawlessly. They wanted to be something (else), but they didn't know what. Foreclosure: "What more," many of these persons seem to be asking, "could a woman want than to love and be loved, to be the needed, helpful, devoted companion?" Everything that she was or wanted was bound up in her relationship to her family and her home. She appeared confident and secure, any frustrations to which she admitted were dismissed as a part of "women's role." She described herself largely in terms of personality attributes (warm, kind, etc.), almost never in terms of non-domestic capabilities. Identity Diffusion: There was less commonality to this group than to the others. They had difficulty in defining themselves in terms of either feminine social or gender roles. They described their mothers as non-emulatable and unaccepting. They saw their fathers as idealized but distant. They seemed to be awaiting rescue by some Prince Charming (other than their current husbands and boy-friends). They had exceptionally low self-esteem and were extremely afraid of being hurt or betrayed. Any consistent identity was a negative one.

Discussion

The significant differences among the identity statuses in resolution of previous psychosocial stages supports Erikson's theory, provides further construct validity for the identity statuses, and some discriminant validity for the IPD. As suggested in a research review paper by Waterman and Whitbourne (1980), discriminant validity is at issue with the IPD since all IPD psychosocial stages are reported concurrently at adulthood. Thus, a high score on, say, Autonomy, may just reflect general ego strength rather than "autonomy" *per se*. It is interesting to note that the greatest discriminant validity for the IPD, a test designed to be administered to adults, has been established for the adult psychosocial stages of intimacy and identity.

The finding of a more internal locus of control for mature Identity Achievement women replicates previous research within younger women (Howard, 1975) and is consistent with the qualitative interview material. Regarding this latter, our descriptions of mature women's identity statuses bear a remarkable resemblance to Josselson's (1973) descriptions of college women. It's almost as if we were seeing Josselson's subjects grown-up.

Another issue, not directly addressed by our study, is the theoretical speculation that intimacy concerns constitute an important content area for the development of identity in women. The volume of research evidence has not matched that of the speculation; but it is beginning to trickle in. From our perspective, here are some questions that need answering: Is the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships an important factor in the development of women's identity? Do identity and intimacy co-develop for women? Do they co-develop for some men? If the interpersonal relationships issue *is* important to women's identity development, what implications does

this particular content issue have for the process of identity development? Might it prolong the process? If so, have we included in the Foreclosure status some women who would be called Achievement if we were using the interpersonal relationships criteria?

Two ways in which to begin answering these questions follow. First, a new interview area, "attitudes regarding establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships," might be added to the identity status interview for both men and women. One might then compare this area with the other interview areas of occupation and ideology, in their relationship to dependent variables. Secondly, one might take a more observational, as contrasted with a theoretical, approach to women's identity. This could take the form of in-depth retrospective interviews with 35-40 year old women who we were fairly certain were identity achieved. The aim would be to elicit a description of their identity development over time--sort of a road map of identity development from someone who has been there.

In any case, the process variables underlying the identity statuses (exploration and commitment) seem relevant to women's identity development. What is being questioned here is the content of women's identity development: around what life issues is women's identity constellated; and, furthermore, what is the sequence of psychosocial stages in that development?

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